



IndependentWHO
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Dr Margaret Chan
Director-General of WHO
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12 May 2011

Subject: Letter from the collective IndependentWHO after meeting on 4 may 2011 with Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General

Dear Dr. Chan,

We thank you for inviting us and for having received us with great courtesy and in particular for considering us for what we are: "citizen advocates of victims of radioactive contamination."

You explained the institutional position of the World Health Organization headed by you, with its scope and its limitations, defined by both the Agreement with the IAEA and other international agencies and also by two Conventions of 1986 and the International Health Regulations established in 2005.

In this context, we do not doubt your sincerity when you say that our struggle - yours and ours - is common in that you consider it your duty to protect victims of radioactivity and to conduct this task "with entire independence".

After our meeting we none the less decided to continue our vigil in front of WHO. Why?

- Firstly, we did not hear from you concrete proposals that would make it possible, in the short or medium term, to improve the lives of people severely affected by radioactive contamination, particularly that caused by the Chernobyl disaster.

- In your press release dated May 4 you assure that "WHO agrees in principle that research should continue on the health effects of radiation and the research should not be influenced by industry." But that is precisely what we condemn when we ask for a review of your Agreement with the IAEA dated 28 May 1959 (WHA 12-40): the **IAEA**, within its mandate, promotes civilian uses of atomic energy and is thus **linked to the nuclear industry**, which prevents it from recognizing objectively both the uncontrolled risks of atomic power and the health hazards of low doses of radionuclides.

- During our meeting on May 4, you acknowledged that "*Chernobyl has caused more than fifty dead.*" You thereby contradict the joint assessment co-authored by WHO and IAEA (09/05/2005) which refers to "less than fifty deaths and 4,000 potential future deaths." Moreover, a joint statement by WHO and IAEA on Chernobyl, dated April 24, 2009, said the areas affected by the accident are no longer dangerous for the population, which must be "reassured" by "practical

advice" and convinced to "return to normal life." Scientists and doctors on the ground, who face the real problems of health of children or those of the liquidators, have a very different vision of reality. The information they provide to us remains alarming.

Why should we not expect the Director-General of the WHO to distance herself from the IAEA by a clear rejection of these estimations of deaths caused by Chernobyl and these evaluations which go against reality?

It is clear to us after our meeting that you lack the means to be independent. Far from being in a position to set up – as we have requested -- a team specializing in radiation and health, currently non-existent, you spoke of the "budget deficit of the WHO" which is preparing to lay off staff...

Thus, on the eve of the World Health Assembly opening on 16 May 2011, we reiterate our request for **revision of the WHO-IAEA agreement** of 1959 which makes you dependent on "experts" of the IAEA and the nuclear industry. We urge you to intervene with the international community to obtain the legal and financial independence to enable you to effectively take charge of health problems linked to radioactive contamination, according to your Constitution.

We have provided you with a copy, signed by the authors, of the book by A. Yablokov, V. and A.Nesterenko on the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, translated and published by the New York Academy of Sciences¹. This book is a sum of independent research that provides an assessment of Chernobyl - 985,000 deaths - no relation to the one you co-signed in 2005.

At our first meeting with five senior officials from WHO, July 2, 2009, the idea of organizing a forum where conflicting data and analysis on the health consequences of the Chernobyl accident could be discussed. At our meeting on May 4, you have assured you take into account "all sources, both official and unofficial" for your information. Finally, you referred to the need for transparency in society and "even at WHO!"

Convening such a forum, which becomes increasingly urgent after Fukushima, would meet this need and would demonstrate publicly WHO's will to be independent. It would make public the actual situation in the contaminated territories and determine what steps should be taken in terms of research and health-care.

Please accept, Madam Director-General, the assurance of our deepest respect.

Eric Peytremann
For IndependentWHO

¹ *Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment*, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, VOL. 1181, 2009